

KENTUCKY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

STAFF NOTE

Review Item:

Elementary and Middle School Norm-Referenced Tests

Applicable Statute or Regulation:

KRS 158.6453, 703 KAR 5:020

History/Background:

Existing Policy. The Kentucky Board of Education (KBE) has established the goal of proficiency for all Kentucky schools by 2014. The accountability system provides a metric for measuring progress toward the long-term proficiency goal that is described for a school as a Kentucky Accountability Index of 100. The Accountability Index includes both academic content-based and non-academic measures. The academic content measures are reported in an Academic Index based on student performance on custom, criterion-referenced Kentucky Core Content Tests (KCCT) in reading, mathematics, science, social studies, arts and humanities, practical living/vocational studies and writing. Each KCCT Academic Index is generated from the percentages of students scoring at each performance or achievement standard—Novice, Apprentice, Proficient and Distinguished. Also reported from 1999-2006 as an academic measure were the results of a nationally norm-referenced test in mathematics and reading at grades 3, 6 and 9. The norm-referenced test results were included as five-percent (5%) of a school's accountability calculation. Non-academic measures reported include attendance, retention, dropout and transition to adult life rates.

As the Kentucky Board of Education moved through the process of revising the state's assessment and accountability program, both federal and state legislative requirements impacted the decisions made regarding the inclusion of norm-referenced tests in school accountability calculations. In the 2006 session of the Kentucky General Assembly, the passage of Senate Bill (SB) 130 added three readiness exams to the assessment system—EXPLORE, PLAN and the ACT—and an optional WorkKeys assessment. EXPLORE at grade 8 and PLAN at grade 10 replaced the norm-referenced test (NRT) that had been administered at grades 6 and 9 respectively. The previous NRT used in Kentucky had been a commercially available assessment that was reserved for use in Kentucky and results were included in accountability. The first administration of EXPLORE in 2006 used a nationally available form that remains in circulation for several years. Due to the national availability of this form of EXPLORE and test security issues, staff recommended EXPLORE results not be included in accountability. PLAN is replaced annually and PLAN results were recommended for inclusion in accountability.

On the federal level, the No Child Left Behind Act required that Kentucky develop a coherent system of annual testing of reading and mathematics in grades 3—8. For the first time in 2007, third graders took a Kentucky Core Content Test in Reading and Mathematics consistent with tests administered in grades four (4) through eight (8). Concerns were expressed that to continue also testing grade 3 with a NRT in reading and mathematics was redundant. Districts had expressed a desire for flexibility to choose an elementary NRT that best fit their district assessment plans.

KDE interpretation of Kentucky statutes determined that a NRT shall be administered at each level, but KBE had the authority to allow flexibility at the elementary level and to establish the components of accountability. In February 2007, KBE gave final approval to revisions of regulation 703 KAR 5:020. The revised regulation required that norm-referenced tests at elementary and middle schools be administered and reported, but did not include results in the calculations of the accountability index.

Elementary schools were permitted the flexibility to choose a NRT approved by the Kentucky Department of Education. The regulation requires administration of reading and mathematics components once during the elementary school, reporting of the results publicly and discussion of individual student results with parents. At middle school, EXPLORE must be administered at grade 8, reported publicly and with parents, and used in the development of a student's Individual Learning Plan (ILP).

At the April KBE meeting, the Hearing Officers Report indicated that during the Education, Assessment and Accountability Review Subcommittee (EAARS) review of revisions to 703 KAR 5:020 on March 21, a different interpretation of Kentucky statutes was discussed. Members of EAARS sent a letter to the Kentucky Board of Education expressing their interpretation. EAARS stated that a single, uniform elementary NRT should be required and results included in the elementary school accountability formula. At the middle school level, EAARS asked that KBE inquire about reserving a form of EXPLORE for Kentucky. They also felt the statute required EXPLORE results be included in middle school accountability.

Policy Issues:

The Kentucky Board of Education will need to consider the interpretation of EAARS and KBE's previous decisions that yielded the current requirements in the 703 KAR 5:020 regulation approved in February. At the elementary level, schools are implementing the current requirements for NRT testing and reporting. At the middle school level, EXPLORE was administered in September 2006.

Reporting in August 2007 will be based on the content area weights defined currently in 703 KAR 5:020. A decision to include NRT results as a part of elementary and middle school accountability would require that content area weights be revised in the accountability calculation formulas applicable to the 2007-08 school year.

If a single, uniform assessment is added at the elementary level, a request for proposal will need to be released to secure a vendor for the elementary NRT. KBE will need to decide at what grade level an elementary NRT will be required and a test administration window. To this end, KDE has analyzed the patterns of 2006-07 NRT testing reported by districts in fulfillment of the requirements of 703 KAR 5:020. Of the 169 districts reporting to date, only 8 indicate that they will not test in either grade 2 or 3 with 10 more districts favoring grade 2. Districts report using various testing products from approximately 10 different vendors. Although this data has somewhat limited use because many districts had to make last minute decisions as they waited on the regulatory process, KDE will present it to the District Assessment Coordinators (DAC) Advisory group and the School Curriculum, Assessment and Accountability Committee during their May meetings to secure further input. Additionally, KDE staff is prepared to quickly release a request for proposal for a statewide administration of a norm- referenced test to include appropriate technology support for special needs students.

KDE has also been in discussion with ACT regarding a reserved form of the EXPLORE so that consideration can be given to use of these scores in CATS accountability. ACT, Inc. has indicated that it will be able to dedicate a form to Kentucky and any other state interested in statewide administration in 2007-08 at no additional cost. Upon KDE request, ACT, Inc. will project the costs for subsequent years as soon as possible.

School year 2006-2007 has been a transition one for the assessment and accountability program and schools have been challenged to implement changes in a short timeframe following final approval of the 703 KAR 5:020 in February. Although there will continue to be many topics to discuss and goals set to improve the assessment and accountability system, schools value stability in requirements so that they may focus their efforts on ensuring every child is proficient and prepared for success.

Impact on Getting to Proficiency:

Assessment and accountability is a critical piece in measuring progress of students and schools across the state.

Contact Person:

Pam Rogers, Associate Commissioner
Office of Assessment and Accountability
502-564-2256
pamela.rogers@education.ky.gov

Deputy Commissioner

Interim Commissioner of Education

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